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ABSTRACT

The current educational emphasis on the "global community" misses the most immediate and concrete area where students can make a difference: the locality. Without negating the importance of having a sense of responsibility toward the global community, a pedagogy of place argues that children cannot comprehend, much less feel a commitment toward, issues and problems in distant places until they have a well-grounded knowledge of their own place. The place that one inhabits can teach about the interdependency of social and natural systems. Understanding a pedagogy of place is understanding the purpose of education: the development of competence, care, and appreciation in political, environmental, and aesthetic areas. Two public secondary schools serving poor students in Colombia promote a pedagogy of place that defends the integrity of the community and surrounding environment. Fernandez Guerra Secondary School in the semi-urban town of Santander de Quilichao uses an interdisciplinary approach in which each grade focuses on a locally relevant theme and a social or ecological project. Tomas Herrera Cantillo Secondary School in the isolated village of Penoncito engages students in organic agriculture and animal husbandry projects relevant to sustainable community development. Examples show how the schools transmit competence, care, and appreciation in the direction of political, aesthetic, and environmental awareness and also prepare students for national standardized tests and avoid parochialism. (Contains 17 references.) (SV)

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If we all go global, what happens to the local? In defense of a pedagogy of place

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Abstract

The case is made that any efforts to teach children about the global community will fail unless there is a solid foundation in local knowledge and experience. The article focuses on two public secondary schools in Colombia that serve poor students and seek to improve the locality from a social, environmental, political, economic and artistic standpoint. The schools employ a pedagogy that stresses competence, care and appreciation in a context in which students actively enhance the community and local ecosystem. I call this general approach to teaching and learning a 'pedagogy of place.'

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If we all go global, what happens to the local?
In defense of a pedagogy of place

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"Knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are."
Paul Shepard

The social, economic and technological changes that are giving rise to the 'global community' are influencing educators to re-evaluate the conventional educational rhetoric and emphasize the need for fostering a 'global citizenry.' While the defense rests on grounds of promoting a better understanding among cultures and preparing the workforce for the 21st century, students' own backyards are seldom explored. The stress on the global community misses the most immediate and concrete area where students can make a difference: the locality. Moreover, the fostering of global students is repeatedly done through the antiquated and misguided individualized, decontextualized and fragmented modern education so common in schools. The 'more of the same' problem appears to stem mostly from the inertia of tradition, a misunderstanding of the purpose of education, and the lack of viable educational models that could serve as alternative.

In this article I present one such alternative, a 'pedagogy of place.' Without negating the importance of having a sense of responsibility towards the global community, a pedagogy of place argues that children cannot comprehend, even less feel a sense of commitment towards, issues and problems that occur in distant places until they have a well-grounded knowledge of their own place. Studying about and acting on the locality is a vital means for understanding the importance of collective solutions, contextualizing academic education in meaningful situations, and promoting a balance between reflection and activism.

This article first focuses on the importance of place, stressing the role played by the interdependence between social groups and ecosystems. It then describes the main characteristics of a pedagogy of place, contrasting them to those of modern schooling. Afterwards, it portrays two public secondary schools in Colombia that, while serving extremely poor student populations, have placed at the center of the educational process the student, the community and the natural habitat. The article ends with various issues and problems encountered by the schools that have a direct relevance to this pedagogy.

The Importance of Place

From the Latin *planta* (sole of the foot), 'place' originally connoted a specific earthy quality of attachment. It signified the most immediate contact with the land that sustained people. It reminded them that they were not ethereal, abstract beings floating in space, but rather down-to-earth (in the most literal sense), physical beings rooted in a particular time and location. The fact that people used their imagination and bodies to travel to distant lands and time periods did not diminish this basic human quality of belongingness. Even nomadic groups who traveled hundreds of miles had, for the most part, a profoundly reverential attitude towards the land and a way of life that respected the resilience of the environment (Ponting, 1991: 263).

Perhaps no other aspect of people's lives can teach about the interdependency of social and natural systems better than the places they inhabit. This interdependency shapes who they are as human beings. As Paul Shepard wrote, "The landscape is a kind of archive where the individual moves simultaneously through his personal and [collective] past, a journey into time and space refreshing the meaning of his own being" (1977: 31). Depending on the type of surroundings, people may develop intimate relationships based on care and respect or shallow ones based on utilitarianism and efficiency. This distinction is at the core of Ivan Illich's categories of "inhabitant" and "resident" (1984). To inhabit is to develop an organic relationship with the place one lives in and learn to love it. To reside is a mechanistic and programmed action in which the individual lives amid the "the architectural expressions of deplacement," as David Orr wrote (1992). The car, bus, street, mall, building, office, accompanied by hundreds of thousands if not millions of individuals rushing from one place to the next, hinder the possibility of a reciprocal and friendly relationship between person and place. As Orr (1992: 102-103) stated:

> "The resident is a temporary and rootless occupant who mostly needs to know where the banks and stores are in order to plug in. The inhabitant and a particular habitat cannot be separated without doing violence to both. Knowledge for the resident is theoretical and abstract, akin to training. For inhabitants, knowledge is the art of living toward wholeness."

Understanding how a sense of place lost its importance in contemporary societies is essential for bringing the discussion back to life. One main reason had to do with the universalization of the modern school. As several authors have discussed (Benavot and Riddle, 1988; Boli, Ramirez, and Meyer, 1985; Meyer and Hannan, 1979), when the modern school started to spread around the world from the 19th century onwards, it carried with it a number of features that included a penchant for in-door education; a fragmented curriculum; the hailing

of national life and history; and a general approach to the social and natural sciences that had little relevance with students' daily lives. Leaders of the emerging nation-states were educated for more than ten years of their lives sequestered by four walls and prevented from having interactions with the outside world. They acquired the ability to think in narrow terms, to dissect reality into minute particulars, to perceive life in unambiguous, clean and dichotomous terms. And they learned to despise or disregard local histories, customs and languages in favor of their more powerful national and, in the case of developing nations, imperial counterparts. Despite vast historical, geographic, cultural and socio-economic realities, the modern school imposed or adopted worldwide was, with few differences, strikingly similar. This was only possible by systematically eliminating local knowledge and skills that had the pattern of place predicated upon them.

The modern school may have been an adequate answer to the social reality of early 19th-century Europe—cities were few, the majority of the population was rural, technologies were simple, basic goods and services were produced in the vicinity, and the relationship with nature was relatively benign. Since then, however, while the school has stubbornly retained most of its original features, the world has witnessed drastic social and technological changes, many of which threaten the viability of social systems and ecosystems at a global scale. Simply put, the modern school has not been and is no longer capable of addressing the vast changes of the 20th century in a manner that dignifies the individual and the community. Revamping the educational process to adequately respond to these new realities thus becomes a pedagogical imperative.

A Pedagogy of Place

Understanding a pedagogy of place is understanding the *purpose* of education. Too often, piecemeal educational reforms are implemented that, while positive, do not belong to a larger pedagogical purpose and thus end up failing in their educational mission. Experiential education, cooperative education, environmental education, smaller-size classes, more teacher training, more comprehensive standardized exams...the list of reforms is long, tedious, and ultimately self-defeating. The busy life of schools prevents educational constituencies from halting the machine, taking a deep breath, and asking 'What is education for?' The usual answer of learning critical and problem solving skills for improving students' lives is too often limited to simple knowledge transmission. Contrary to this practice, the social and ecological malaise that affect our societies demand from schools nothing less than an uncompromising commitment to life, something emphasized by Alfred North Whitehead when he wrote: "There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations" (1949: 18). Thus, I posit that education should seek to develop competence, care and appreciation in improving the political, environmental and

aesthetic dimensions of individuals. The qualities of competence (of which knowledge transmission is just one component), care and appreciation find their highest expression in the following three fundamental, interconnected realizations:

All education is political
All education is environmental
All education is aesthetic

All education is political acknowledges the unequal relationships of power existing in society. No form of education that calls itself responsible can ignore this reality. As Henry Giroux stated, exploring unjust forms of social, economic or political interactions will help foster in students "critical citizenship, not simply good citizenship" (1992: 74). Critical citizenship means helping students to learn about their own personal and communal histories and voices. It means allowing them to challenge and even transform situations that hurt themselves or others. It means assisting students to see how their lives are fully integrated with the lives of others.

Politics is not just a component of education but is embedded in the whole activity of education. Politics is found in the student-teacher relationship, whether authoritarian or democratic; in the procedure for choosing the content, whether it is a shared decision, the teacher's prerogative, or imposed by outside forces; in the subjects chosen for the curriculum, both the voices that are heard and those that are ignored or silenced; in the freedom students feel to question the curriculum. Ultimately, as Ira Shor wrote, "education is politics because it is one place where individuals and society are constructed" (1993: 28).

In terms of voices that are given a legitimate space, it must be recognized that many teachers do teach about different forms of exploitation in society (racism, classism, sexism, and so on). Few, however, provide students with the necessary opportunities to make a change. Critical citizenship means not only learning about struggles against inequality and expanding the discourse of human rights, but actively attempting to join (or form) collective movements to redress injustices.

'Competence' in this respect means possessing the knowledge and skills to comprehend the local reality as it is (which at the very least should include basic literacy and numerical skills); it involves the direct experience with local situations; it requires learning about other realities, both in time and place. If the topic under discussion are economic relations, students (and here the role of the teacher is fundamental) should learn about the capitalist system in all its forms (including the presence of unions and cooperatives), how to challenge a system that places more emphasis on material growth than on human well-being, and about other economic systems in which communities are self-sufficient and the market plays a secondary role. 'Care' means helping students develop a sense of

compassion towards the plight of others. It means challenging indifference and resignation towards dire circumstances. 'Appreciation' means having admiration, approval or gratitude for the work of others, for engaging in arduous and at times frustrating collective actions, for attempting to imagine more humane conditions. Appreciation (just as care) can also be directed towards the self, for learning a new skill, for helping out others, for summoning the courage to finish a difficult task.

Some have claimed that acknowledging the political nature of education and regarding students as agents of transformation is synonymous with indoctrinating them into ideological submission (e.g., Kimball, 1990; Searle, 1990). They argue that any educational reform should be guided by value-free and objective aims. These writers, however, confuse the cooptation of students to serve a teacher's political bent with assisting students to use a set of expectations as reference for active learning. Teachers' ideological beliefs should not be mistaken with the pedagogy they employ. While education should serve as an avenue through which students learn to adapt to society and change it when necessary, it is possible to adopt a pedagogy that makes students critically aware without reducing them to receivers of a particular ideology.

All education is environmental acknowledges the full integration between the social and the natural world. As societies become more urbanized and the separation between social and natural systems widens, children (and adults) become indifferent to and uninformed about the consequences regarding the usage and disposal of materials. Out of sight, out of mind and heart. Education should strive to pass on the lesson that actions undertaken by individuals that involve the use of materials or energy (and most actions do) have repercussions on the environment.

One way of addressing this issue is by using the campus as a pedagogical tool (Orr, 1994; 1992). Every educational institution is a living community that imports and exports matter and energy. It imports water, electricity, food, paper and other materials; it exports garbage and organic wastes. The sources of these materials (mines, wells, rivers, farms) and their eventual deposit (dumps, landfills, rivers, oceans) are the least discussed places in the contemporary curriculum. Yet they are the most tangible connections between the campus and the world beyond. Some of the questions that could be asked in class are: what are the food sources from the school's cafeteria? Was some of the produce cultivated organically? What forests were cut down to supply the school with paper? Does the organic waste from the restrooms pollute riverine or coastal ecosystems? The list of questions is virtually endless. The study of campus resource flows transcends disciplinary boundaries by connecting the foreground of experience with the background of environmental sources and distant places. A slew of environmental problems is uncovered that makes for rich interdisciplinary discussions. Moreover, if the discussions are coupled with the

search for and implementation of alternatives that are ecologically sensitive and economically viable, students will learn to be 'critical citizens.'

Along with avoiding the "fatal disconnection of subjects" that Whitehead so criticized (1949: 18), the study of place from an environmental standpoint has three other advantages: first, it overcomes the extreme individualism of modern schooling. Given that neither teachers nor textbooks have the answers to the above questions, the quest for knowledge becomes truly cooperative. Teachers are forced to relinquish their role as the sole possessors of knowledge and start a collective search with students, parents and community members. Second, it brings to the fore local knowledge and wisdom. And third, it reduces large and difficult to solve global problems to a manageable scale. A group of students cannot solve the problem of global warming, but they can help save forests by starting a comprehensive recycling program and motivating campus administrators to buy recycled, post-consumer waste paper.

While care for and appreciation of the natural world is often taught in schools (albeit seldom accompanied by direct experience), competence about the natural world is usually absent. Competence takes the form of knowledge coupled with skills for living well. Based on sustainability principles, 'living well' means learning to satisfy basic needs with minimum environmental damage. Take, for instance, food production. Few schools teach children how to grow their own food, and the few that do (particularly rural vocational schools), employ conventional agricultural methods that foul the air, soil and water. Not only does teaching children to grow food using organic methods goes a long way to satisfying our tripartite goal of fostering competence (knowledge and skill), care (for a living thing that will later nourish the body), and appreciation (for the wonder of growth and life itself) but it is also an ideal platform for teaching the concept of interdependency between social and natural systems, so missing in the modern curriculum.

All education is aesthetic acknowledges the importance of art in a person's life. By 'art' I do not mean the elitist version of commodified artistic expression. I mean all modes of self or collective expression through lines, images, materials, shapes, movements, words, sounds. Art that awakens the senses, that produces an emotion, that does not engender indifference. Who has not felt goose pumps upon hearing a certain melody or viewing a certain painting, or what dancer has not felt the exhilaration of his or her body moving in the air or what sculptor the sense of discovery as the rock gives way to a new form. Every culture generates its own art, which is ultimately an expression and extension of the self, the people, the place. It is generally most meaningful to those who live where the art originated because it has the indelible imprint of a specific cultural group and locality.

The engagement in any form of art requires competence. It forces the artist to use dexterity, creativity and knowledge to create something new, at least

in the eyes of the artist. Art also requires care, and more specifically, sensitivity. No work of art can come to life without at least a modicum amount of sensitivity. Being sensitive means being vulnerable, allowing oneself to be carried away by the artistic moment. Both competence and care are tied to appreciation. Appreciation of the aesthetic has two main dimensions (Jarrett 1991, chapter 11 and 14): first, there is appreciation of the aesthetic object or experience as is, outside the mediation of knowledge. Take, for instance, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, "Choral." Without knowing anything about Beethoven's life, his intentions, or the historical context when it was composed, a listener may still enjoy the symphony fully and be moved by it. But there is a second dimension of appreciation, the aesthetic experience mediated through knowledge. What if the listener learns that Beethoven composed the Choral when he was completely deaf, that Beethoven was the first one to use choral voices in symphonic form, and that the Choral was the first symphony to address the fundamental existential problems underlying human life? Inevitably, his or her sense of appreciation changes and a new sensitivity towards the piece is experienced. One dimension is not necessarily more legitimate than the other; rather, both forms of appreciation complement each other.

Two Colombian Secondary Schools

I will now focus on two public secondary schools in Colombia, South America that serve poor students and promote a form of education that defends the integrity of the community and surrounding environment.[1] Started in the late 1980s, the two schools have experimented with an interdisciplinary curriculum that focuses on learning by doing. Disciplines at each grade level converge around one single theme or activity, allowing students to develop a sophisticated understanding of the region and how the region is related to a much larger national and international arena. While 'inter-disciplinarity' has become a popular slogan among schools, the two schools provide students not only with a holistic understanding of their reality but also with practical applications in their daily life. The schools call their pedagogical approach 'ecological education.'

Fernández Guerra Secondary School (Ferguerra)

Ferguerra is located in Santander de Quilichao, a semi-urban town of some 50 thousand inhabitants in the southwestern region of Colombia, lying just an hour away from the country's second largest city, Cali. With a student population of about 700 (afternoon shift), the school has an academic orientation with a daily schedule divided in blocks of two hours each. The main characteristic of the school is that each grade level concentrates on a different theme, and as the grade level increases so does the theme's geographic scope and complexity. The sole exception is 9th grade, which focuses once again on the locality. The research topics are:

6th grade: The basin of the Quilichao River (which traverses the town).
7th grade: The sugar cane agro-industry (the region's most important cash crop).
8th grade: The ethnic inter-culturization of Colombia's southwest region.
9th grade: Citizen participation (focuses on Quilichao itself, and students participate in improving their community).
10th grade: Science and technology (focuses traditional and modern technologies used regionally and nationally).
11th grade: Globalization of the economy and health issues in Colombia's Pacific Coast (three hours away from Quilichao is Buenaventura, Colombia's most important port).

All core disciplines (humanities, mathematics, social sciences and natural sciences) focus around each of these topics. Students have to investigate each one from a multi-disciplinary lens and participate in improving the conditions of the segment of reality under study. In addition, each grade level has a different productive project that addresses a different social or ecological problem.

Tomás Herrera Cantillo Secondary School (Peñoncito)
Peñoncito is located in the village of the same name, an isolated fishing and agricultural village of about 2,000 people in the northern part of Colombia. Peñoncito is situated 15 minutes by boat from one of the country's most important colonial towns, Mompóx (pop. 20,000). With less than 200 students, Peñoncito is a vocational school with an emphasis on organic agriculture and husbandry. The main characteristic of the school is that the disciplines of each grade level focus around a productive project. Peñoncito's projects are:

6th Grade: Medicinal Botanical Garden.
7th grade: Organic Garden and Rabbit-Raising.
8th Grade: Greenhouse and Veterinary Services.
9th Grade: Vermiculture.
10th Grade: Aquaculture.
11th Grade: Aquaculture.

The projects' success has been compromised by the lack of running water. Since its foundation, the school has demanded the state government to install an aqueduct in the school premises, but apparently due to political opposition its demands are yet to be met. The school's only source of water consists of an artesian well. Peñoncito lacks other basic infrastructure and materials: there is no sewage system, not enough student desks, no teacher's lounge, no sports

court or laboratory, and at most one textbook per classroom. Despite these problems, Peñoncito has been able to consolidate its educational model, and with its use of low-input agriculture has even inspired the creation of other organic schools and farms in the region.

Illustrations of a Pedagogy of Place

I will provide different examples to show how Ferguerra and Peñoncito attempt to transmit competence, care and appreciation in the direction of political, environmental, and aesthetic awareness. Although for ease of presentation the examples will be placed somewhat arbitrarily in one of the three dimensions, the reader should keep in mind that the strong interdependency between them allows the same example to be placed in the other two dimensions as well. The few illustrations below are part of a larger pedagogical whole that includes a continuous reflection in the classroom and involvement outside of the school.

Political Dimension

1. Both schools strive to create knowledge collectively, in order for students to feel owners of knowledge as an important source of empowerment. Ferguerra, for instance, tries to strike a balance between passing on previously collected knowledge, and creating knowledge between teachers and students. Ferguerra chose the themes for each grade level based not on each teacher's expertise but on what it considered to be the most important topics for the community. Given that there is no set body of knowledge that supports the themes, new situations arise every year for which teachers do not have any clear answers. Consequently, they are forced to step down from the traditional pedestal of omniscience and figure out the solutions with the help of all participants. Moreover, students are trained as researchers so that they come up with their own hypotheses and figure out on their own, with the teacher's assistance, ways of testing them. Finally, the school invites presentations by external speakers (parents, community members and specialists), reinforcing the idea that neither the teacher nor any other single person is the possessor of all knowledge and experience, and that only collectively can people achieve a profound comprehension of a subject.

2. Before the founding of Peñoncito, buying votes by local and regional politicians was institutionalized. Peñoncito decided to face head-on this tradition by campaigning for clean elections. Nowadays, before every municipal election, students distribute leaflets in nearby villages and organize community fora on the importance of democratic values and fair elections. They also invite candidates to present their political platform in front of students and parents, something that had never been done before. Given the popularity of the school, all politicians accept, and a student watchdog committee has been formed to ensure that the politicians' promises are fulfilled. These strategies have helped to

politicize the student body and community and have pushed for greater accountability, but they have also awoken the antagonism of a part of the regional political establishment, which has, among other things, withheld funds for the aqueduct the school so desperately needs.

3. At the economic level, the productive projects provide entrepreneurial skills to students. While the schools do not realistically expect students to start their own businesses upon graduation, the projects do help students to earn pocket money and even to provide minimum financial assistance to their families. At Peñoncito, the most successful project from a financial standpoint is the 6th grade medicinal botanical garden. It began in the early 1990s when students asked their mothers and grandmothers to make a list of medicinal plants, both rare and common. The teacher, with the aid of some mothers, studied the lists and selected about 50 medicinal plants, a mixture of rare and common. Students found specimens of each plant and planted them in the botanical garden. In terms of the productive project, each 6th grader is in charge of several plants. Two or three times a year, students go to different towns in the region to sell branches from their plants. Depending on the rarity of the plant, each branch can cost between $0.10 cents to $2 dollars. Profits are divided between the student (60 percent), the teacher (20 percent) and the school (20 percent).

Environmental Dimension

1. At Ferguerra's 6th grade productive project, students make paper, cards and boxes (for sale) out of fruit waste. The fruit waste is obtained from fruit vendors in the town's main plaza, who sell pineapple, bananas, and *lulo* (a local fruit). In the past, the skin, stem and part of the pulp would often end up as garbage on the street. Nowadays, thanks to the cajoling of students and the local waste collector, fruit vendors put the rejects in plastic bags that are later picked up by the waste collection company. Every two weeks the students collect the bags from the garbage company and take them to the school compounds. Students then make paper and other items that are sold to shops locally and in nearby towns. The specific benefits from this project are numerous: the main plaza remains clean and the environmental consciousness of fruit vendors and customers is raised; waste becomes an economic resource; and students learn novel ways of producing a basic need such as paper without using any trees. All this, while earning some money.

2. The 9th grade theme studied at Ferguerra, citizen participation, looks among other issues at the passage of a new law that seeks to attract businesses and industries to the region. The law exempts new firms from paying local taxes for a number of years and provides them with economic incentives to acquire land. Many businesses have taken up on the offer, bringing with them economic prosperity but also a slew of social and environmental problems. Although the

firms are supposed to abide by environmental and social regulations, the state lacks resources or interest to enforce the regulations. Ferguerra, on its side, teamed up with regional organizations to study the environmental and social impact of the new firms, and to serve as a watchdog to guarantee the law's compliance.

3. At Peñoncito, the aquaculture teacher and students hold periodic workshops to teach local fishermen basic knowledge and techniques of sustainable fishing. Among the lessons conveyed are the importance of using nets with larger holes to catch only the bigger fish; of cultivating fish in the marshes with cages (an untapped potential in the region that Peñoncito is experimenting with); of making the cages with PVC instead of bamboo because PVC lasts longer and bamboo extraction threatens the healthiness of the local ecosystem; of learning the nutritional value of a type of fish found in abundance in the marshes that villagers do not eat because they consider inedible (the school has organized barbecues in which the fish is served and little by little is becoming popular in the local diet).

Aesthetic Dimension

1. Peñoncito is built on a piece of land that was virtually donated by one of the student's parents. At the time, the land was barren, with no trees and little grass. Over the years, students, teachers and parents have transformed the campus into a lushly green area that abounds with all kinds of trees, most of which are native to the region. When I asked students to identify some of them, they were able to name all of the 30 species of trees at the school, including fruit, timber, ornamental and medicinal trees. The beautification campaign is not restricted to the school. When Peñoncito was founded there were few trees in the village. The school, with the help of community members, planted about 200 trees, one for each household. A few weeks after the reforestation campaign ended, most trees had been pulled down—presumably by teenagers not studying at the school. The following year, another campaign was organized, 200 new trees were planted, and about 50 survived the second onslaught. The third year, a new campaign was organized and this time most of the trees survived. Today, hundreds of trees enliven the roads, provide needed shade for many houses, and keep the roads dry during the rainy season.

2. At Ferguerra, a Festival of Elders is organized annually in which elder members from the area share personal stories, poetry and music. The festival lasts for several days and everyone from the community is invited to attend. At Peñoncito, an elder man from the village teaches Xandé, a native dance that is becoming extinct, to the school's dance troupe every Saturday morning. Thanks to both schools, native cultural manifestations are recuperated and local knowledge and skills gain respect and appreciation.

Some emerging issues

Dealing with Curricular Changes

By its very nature, a pedagogy of place demands a radical revisioning of curricular content. It requires introducing local topics and concerns in an already crowed conventional curriculum. Take, for instance, our example of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. Why teach Beethoven and not *vallenatos,* a musical genre that is native to the northern part of Colombia, is popular among students, and speaks about local realities—an ideal topic of study for Peñoncito. One is tempted to solve the dilemma by saying, "both should be taught." In truth, the answer is not so simple. First, given space constraints, some areas of study would have to be dismissed to accommodate the new ones. Who would make those decisions? In both Colombian schools the themes/productive projects were decided by teachers and administrators, with some input by parents. Should it not be a more democratic and open process? Should any person be allowed to intervene? Once these questions are answered—no easy task in itself—what criteria should be used in the decision-making process? If both musical genres are chosen, why is Beethoven chosen over, say, Malay music? Arguably, classical music is not much closer to students' lives than Malay music is. One could justify choosing classical music due to practical reasons (its easier to find a teacher of classical than of Malay music) and to the greater influence of classical music around the world, but that should not detract teachers from discussing with students *why* is it easier to find a teacher of classical music. The discussions would help students to place in a historical and political context curricular decisions that at face value appear neutral.

Educating without Shortchanging Students

In the implementation of the pedagogy of place, schools walk a fine line between being truthful to their educational model and providing students with a satisfactory academic instruction as defined by conventional terms. Schools cannot, in good conscience, graduate students with superb ecological literacy but a poor knowledge of the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1988) or poor academic standards (low literacy or numerical skills). The National Standardized Examination, called in Colombia ICFES, brings this issue to bear.

The ICFES is a two-day long, multiple-choice test students take at the end of their secondary school studies (11th grade). Generally, students from elite private schools score higher than students from public schools, generating the perception that private schools are 'better' and their students more 'intelligent.' Children, teachers, parents and almost everyone else await anxiously the day of the results to find out how good a given school is. Given that a school's reputation is at stake, many schools couch the last year's curriculum on preparing for the examination. The ICFES poses special problems for students from Peñoncito and Ferguerra because they are unfamiliar with the form and

content of the examination. Aware of the political and social importance of the test, the two schools have tried to go around the problem – with relative success. Ferguerra, for example, offers extra-curricular classes designed to improve students' scores from the beginning of 11th grade until the day of the exam. Lasting for about six hours each week, the classes cover content relevant to the test and all the necessary tricks to perform better. So far the strategy has worked: students' scores are relatively high and parents have expressed satisfaction with the results.

Avoiding Parochialism

Implementing a pedagogy of place raises the danger of educating children to be parochial and ethnocentric. While the pedagogy stressed here does encourage students to develop a deep and sophisticated understanding of their own region, it need not be synonymous with narrow-mindedness. When Ferguerra students go into the field to learn about the Quilichao River, their focus is mainly that particular river, not the Nile or the Rhine. Students learn that their locality evolved through centuries of changes of which the river was a focal point. They also learn that the river's well-being determines to a great degree the well-being of the locality. Students' identification with the local river is complemented with a larger meta-level of identification: the Quilichao River flows into the Cauca River, and this one into the Magdalena River, and this one into the Atlantic Ocean, and those waters eventually mix with those from the Rhine and the Nile. These waters evaporate, form clouds, and precipitate as rain. The realization that every molecule of water in the planet is recycled again and again, both from the past and into the future, establishes a common universal link. Parochialism is thus replaced by biospheric and cosmological participation. Students learn that they are connected both geographically with human and non-human life of other regions and historically with the past and future (Berg, 1998).

Conclusion

This article has sought to challenge a basic premise of recent educational reforms by asking the question: how can children be expected to be global citizens if they have at best a mediocre understanding of their own region? John Dewey noted in 1916 that conventional schooling is dominated by dualisms: separation of individual from collectivity, mind from body, theory from practice, work from play, school from community, and society from nature. More than 80 years after Dewey published *Democracy and Education*, schooling has changed little. One of these recalcitrant dualisms is that most learning takes place indoors – a practice reinforced by the massive introduction of computers. What happens inside the classroom is too artificial, too hygienic, too devoid of the frustrating and messy happenings of daily life. While indoor discussions (and textbooks and to a lesser extent computers) are important to intellectual

development, they are barren when isolated from observation of and direct involvement with actual events and phenomena.

This article left untouched many key issues pertaining to challenges faced by a pedagogy of place. Some of the issues include the role of the central government in assisting (or hindering) schools such as Ferguerra and Peñoncito; the role of teacher-training programs in creating and integrating curriculum along themes relevant to place; the role of teachers and administrators in maintaining their sense of professionalism and camaraderie (at Ferguerra, relationships among teachers and administrators have been greatly strained due to all the changes); and the role of evaluation procedures to ascertain the quality of the programs. These are just a few of the topics that require further exploration to help communities start and consolidate radical approaches such as this one.

Perhaps the cardinal principle of this pedagogy is the notion of 'interdependence.' A locality cannot be understood from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialty. It can only be understood as a complex mosaic of phenomena and situations. While some current educational reforms—most prominently experiential education in its different forms—do stress the notion of interdependence, they are often not part of a larger pedagogical purpose. They are mostly 'learning by doing' for learning's sake. Competence, care and appreciation need to be part of a larger tripartite dimension of the political, environmental and aesthetic. Only then does education fulfill its ethical commitment of reducing, as James Jarrett (1991: 9) wrote, "pain, ugliness, and impoverishment of body and spirit in the world."

[1] The research was based on an ethnographic study the author did in several Colombian schools in 1997.

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